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The Effects of Social Isolation on Those Living with Dementia

Social Isolation Risks:
• Physical changes if physical activity is not optimized:
  - Endurance, flexibility, strength, coordination, balance reduction
  - Blood pressure and blood sugar changes with sedentary patterns
  - Weight gain: muscle shifting to adipose tissue
  - Lack of activity increases the risk of problems with good quality sleep cycles: more drowsing throughout the day or sleeplessness at night
  - Increased risk of falls and fall-related injuries

Social Isolation Risks:
• Social interactions skill changes:
  - Following a conversation: focusing on a dynamic interaction vs. a passive observation
  - Relationships are altered with lack of routine or episodic contact
  - Relationships are altered if there is constant contact
• Language comprehension and production skills changes
Social Isolation Risks:

• Personal and emotional well-being challenges:
  - Self-abuse and neglect risk is heightened
  - Increased seeking of comfort through non-social means, old habits and patterns
  - Staying in one environment increases the risk of disengagement or potential intense exploration in an unsafe or risky way
  - Limiting objects and stimuli causes the brain to be less active and less engaged

Top Five Unmet Needs:

Physical Needs:  
- Hydration and Nourishment
- Wake-sleep and active-rest cycles
- Elimination: all forms
- Find Comfort: 4Fs 4Ss
- Pain-free:
  - Physical – body
  - Emotional – relationships
  - Spiritual – belonging/purpose

Signals of Emotional Distress:
- Angry
- Sad
- Lonely
- Scared
- Bored – Lacking Purpose

Possible Signs of Depression/Anxiety:

- Onset: recent, weeks to months
- Duration: until treated or death
- Alertness and Arousal: not typically changed
- Orientation responses: “I don’t know,” “I can’t say,” “Why are you bothering me with this?” or “I don’t care”
- Mood and Affect: flat, negative, sad, angry
- Causes: situational (i.e. pandemic), seasonal, or chemical
- Treatment of Condition: meds, therapy, physical activity
- Treatment of Behavior: schedule changes and environmental support, combined with meds
Signs of Depression and Anxiety in Those Living with Dementia:
- Often impossible to distinguish and/or separate depression and anxiety
- Depression/anxiety is treatable
- Many elders with depression describe themselves as having ‘memory problems’ or complain of pain, rather than ‘sadness’
- Look for typical and atypical depression
- Look for changes in appetite, sleep, self-care, pleasures, irritability, “I can’t take this” comments, schedule changes

Likely Profiles of Depression/Anxiety in Elderly or Those Living with Dementia:
- Variety of causes
- First episode in late life not uncommon
- Re-emergence of previous undiagnosed depression
- Resistance to seeking help
- If situational depression not addressed, it often escalates

Be on the Lookout for Delirium!
- Onset: sudden, hours to days
- Duration: short, can be either cured or leads to death
- Alertness and Arousal: fluctuates, hyper or hypoalert
- Orientation responses: highly variable
- Mood and Affect: highly variable
- Causes: physiological, psychological
- Treatment of Condition: identify and treat what is wrong
- Treatment of Behavior: manage for safety only, it is short-term so don’t mask symptoms
Be on the Lookout for Delirium!
- Delirium can be dangerous and deadly
- Get a good behavior history, look for change
- Assess for possible pain or discomfort:
  - Assess for infections
  - Assess for med changes or side effects
  - Assess for physiological issues: dehydration, blood chemistry, oxygen saturation
  - Assess for emotional or spiritual pain

For Improved Mental Health, People Living with Dementia Need:
- Daily Routine!!!!
- Help to fill their day with meaning
- Balance of:
  - Productive activity: feeling valued
  - Leisure activity: having fun
  - Self-care activity: wellness, health, personal care
  - Restorative activity: sleep, rest, and re-energizing
- Match-up for preferences:
  - Large group, small group, 1:1, alone
  - Active versus passive
- Sensory options: visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory

Positive Physical Approach™: How to Modify During a Pandemic?
- Pause at edge of public space (6 feet)
- Gesture and greet by name
- Offer your hand and make eye contact
- Approach slowly within visual range
- Shake hands and then maintain Hand-under-Hand®
- Move to the side
- Get to eye level and respect intimate space
- Wait for acknowledgement
Hand-under-Hand® Assistance:

Tips for Connecting When on the Phone or Video Chat:

- For video calls, turn your body sideways away from the camera instead of facing straight on in a more ‘confrontational’ stance
- On video, exaggerate your facial expressions and use lots of hand motions (thumbs up, thumbs down, pointing, gesturing, etc.)
- Share something about yourself first, then ask them something related to that
- Allow pauses in conversation for the person to respond or process—even if they do not have the words to respond

Communication and Connection Strategies While Using PPE:

- Pause at door of room or more than six feet away to make connection and communicate before putting on mask (if allowed)
- Practice ‘smiling’ with your eyes and full body rather than just your mouth
- Make sure you have gloves on and pulled over sleeve cuffs before approaching to do Positive Physical Approach/Hand-under-Hand
**Communication and Connection Strategies While Using PPE:**

- Bring visual props and cueing items that can be left with the person or properly sanitized
- Demonstrate with motions and gestures what you are trying to convey, since your voice may be a bit muffled
- Move your body while in supportive stance to demonstrate what you are wanting the person to do

**Communication and Connection Strategies While Using PPE:**

- Use an open-embrace, exciting posture to catch attention and seek admission
- Slow your motions and words down and listen and look for a reflection that indicates the person is getting what you are offering, before moving on
- Break things down into short and simple pieces if the person is not able to comprehend the messages – use as few words as possible

**Communication and Connection Strategies While Using PPE:**

- Attach a large, laminated picture of yourself (smiling) to the right side of your shirt, where a nametag would normally be
- Wear a covering (i.e. an apron, sweater, or jacket) that has pockets to put things in, such as extra gloves or hand sanitizer
Positive Personal Connections:

- **Greet:** Introduce yourself and use their preferred name
  “Hi Alice, I’m Megan” or “I’m Megan, and you are?”
- **Compliment:** Indicate something about them of value
  “You are looking really colorful today!”
- **Share:** First about you, then leave a blank
  “I’m from Kansas, and you’re from…?”
- **Notice:** Point out something in the environment
  “You must love that plant, seeing how well you care for it.”
- **Seek:** Explore a possible unmet like, want, or need
  “It’s a bit chilly in here, a hot drink would be nice. Do you prefer coffee or tea?”

Positive Action Starters:

- **Help:** Be sure to compliment his or her skill in this area, then ask for help with something
  “You are so good at baking, would you please help me?”
- **Try:** Hold up or point to the item you would like to use, possibly sharing in the dislike of the item or task
  “Could we just try this?”
- **Choice:** Try using visual cues to offer two possibilities or one choice with something else as the other option
  “This, or that?”
- **Short and Simple:** Give only the first piece of information, maybe offer a time frame of 1-5 minutes
  “It’s about time to brush teeth.”
- **Step by Step:** Only give a small part the task at first
  “Lean forward.”
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